

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Kansas
COUNTY:	Douglas
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE	

1. NAME

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC:

Usher, John Palmer, House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

1425 Tennessee

CITY OR TOWN:

Lawrence

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

no. 3, Larry Winn

STATE

Kansas 66044

CODE

20

COUNTY:

Douglas

CODE

045

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) Fraternity house <input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:	Alpha Nu House Association, Beta Theta Pi Fraternity, c/o John H. Kreamer		
STREET AND NUMBER:	Gage, Tucker, Hodges, Kreamer, Kelly & Varner 1000 Bryant Building, Kansas City, Missouri 64106		
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE	
Kansas City	Missouri	29	

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:	Register of Deeds		
STREET AND NUMBER:	Douglas County Courthouse		
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE	CODE	
Lawrence	Kansas 66044	20	

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:	Historic Sites Survey		
DATE OF SURVEY:	1969	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:	Kansas State Historical Society		
STREET AND NUMBER:	120 West Tenth Street		
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE	
Topeka	Kansas 66612	20	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The John Palmer Usher house, now the Beta Theta Pi fraternity house, is a two-story irregular-shaped building with a full basement and an attic. The house is in an Italian villa style, and as one of the first of that style in the area it was considered quite unattractive by the Lawrence residents at the time of its construction.

The exterior walls are constructed of rough hewn grey Vermont limestone laid in uniform horizontal courses. All the individual stones are approximately the same size. Because of the Ushers' fear of tornadoes, the walls were constructed 15 to 21 inches thick. The building rests on a raised base of limestone and features a belt course at the floor line. An ell extending to the rear was built of rubble stone but had the same window lintels as the front portion. A frame third floor has been added to the ell.

The relatively flat hip roof is separated from the wall below by an expanded cornice which is now covered with stucco. The decorative cornice brackets also serve as trim for the attic windows.

First and second floor windows are long slender rectangles with one-piece stone arches at the heads. A large porch at the entry is supported by five metal columns with brackets. Examination of old photographs reveals that the present front porch is at least the third one. All were flat-roofed and the primary differences were in the columns, their number, their spacing and the distance the porch roof extended from the structure.

Interior ceiling heights are 14 feet and the windows are approximately eight feet high. The interior finish was the highlight of the house. The original seven-room house had five fireplaces; the most magnificent was in the music room: a single-piece dark red marble fireplace given to Usher by the other members of President Lincoln's cabinet. Much of the paneling and woodwork was dark walnut trimmed in gold leaf made and installed by craftsmen of the Pullman Palace Car Company. Beams in the living room were made of railroad ties. The newel post of the walnut staircase at the downstairs hall bears the goldleaf monogram of the builder.

After the fraternity acquired the house in 1912, part of the roof apparently was soon elevated to provide the additional attic space. Then in 1925 a buff brick addition was built to the north and west to provide a housemother's room, a dining room, a modern kitchen and more living space. Much of the first floor was severely damaged by a fire in 1941 but subsequently restored.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian☐ 16th Century☐ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1872-1873

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal☐ Education☒ Political☐ Urban Planning☐ Prehistoric☐ Engineering☐ Religion/Phi.☐ Other (Specify)☐ Historic☐ Industry

osophy

☐ Agriculture☐ Invention☐ Science☒ Architecture☐ Landscape☐ Sculpture☐ Art

Architecture

☐ Social/Human-☒ Commerce☐ Literature

itarian

☐ Communications☐ Military☐ Theater☐ Conservation☐ Music☐ Transportation

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The John Palmer Usher house was built in 1872-1873 for the former Secretary of the Interior in Lincoln's cabinet.

A native of New York state, Usher was born in 1816. After admission to the bar in 1839, he moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, to practice. Like Abraham Lincoln, he rode the circuit and he engaged in a number of law-suits with Lincoln. Usher soon established himself as an outstanding lawyer. He represented Vigo county in the Indiana legislature in 1850-1859, and when the Republican party was organized in 1854, he became an ardent supporter of its ideals. He was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress in 1856 and in 1860 he participated in Lincoln's campaign for the Presidency. Appointed attorney general of Indiana in 1861, he resigned after four months to become Lincoln's Assistant Secretary of the Interior. In January, 1863, he became Secretary of the Interior and held that post until May 15, 1865, when he resigned to return to private practice. He wanted to move to one of the new, growing states in the West and to participate in the development of the country.

Usher became general solicitor for the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, and was active in promoting the building of the railroad west from Kansas City. Later called the Kansas Pacific, the road was eventually consolidated with the Union Pacific in 1880.

Usher considered a number of cities in Kansas before establishing the family home at Lawrence. He purchased the building site in March, 1872, and construction of the house was probably completed in 1873. According to a letter from Usher to his wife, right after the purchase, the lot measured 188 by 641 feet, and at the rear of the lot was a spring which would provide all the water they would need. He also wrote that the plan of the house would be very similar to their former home.

The cost of the mansion was considerably reduced by Usher's ability to obtain materials through his railroad connections at much less than market prices. The estimated cost of the house and lot was \$30,000.

Although he served one term as mayor of Lawrence, Usher's relations with the community were not always friendly. As mayor he forbade the grazing of cattle in South Park. The people were so outraged that the City Council passed an ordinance regulating the speed of Union Pacific trains through Lawrence.

During his years as general attorney for the Union Pacific, Usher

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(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

8.

argued many important cases on behalf of the railroad, particularly in regard to land grants and relations with other railroads. In 1887 he retired from active work; he died April 13, 1889.

The Usher family continued to live in the house for a period of years. Then in 1912 it was acquired by the Alpha Nu chapter of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity for use as a chapter house, a use it still has.

This imposing Italianate house was one of the most magnificent of 19th century Lawrence. Its owner, John Palmer Usher, who had earlier attained political prominence as a member of Lincoln's cabinet, was one of the most influential and successful railroad attorneys of his day. As the General Counsel of the Union Pacific railroad, he had a strong voice in the development and expansion of that railroad.

9.

Lawrence Daily Journal, April 18, 19, 1889.

Letters to Margaret Usher from John Palmer Usher, December 29, 1871, February 11, 1872, March 4, 1872. (John Palmer Usher Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas).

Letter to Samuel Usher from "H," August 1, 1872. (John Palmer Usher Collection, Manuscript Division, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas).

Loomis, Nelson H., "John Palmer Usher," foreword to John Palmer Usher, President Lincoln's Cabinet (Omaha, n.p., 1925), a reprint of an Usher speech, pp. 5-10.

Malone, Dumas, Dictionary of American Biography, v. 19 (New York: Charles Scribner Sons, 1936), pp. 134, 135.

Nineteenth Century Houses in Lawrence, Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Museum of Art, 1968).

Richardson, Elmo R., and Farley, Alan W., John Palmer Usher (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960).

Swan, Bob, editor, The Alpha Nu of Beta Theta Pi, 1873-1973 (n.p., 1973), pp. 9, 10.

Topeka Capital, January 28, 1927; October 14, 1928; April 12, 1973.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Abel, Anna Heloise, "Indian Reservations in Kansas and the Extinguishment of their Title," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, vol. 8 (1904), p. 100.

Byers, Otto Philip, "The Conception and Growth of a Kansas Railroad," Kansas State Historical Society Collections, vol. 12 (1912), pp. 383, 384.

Ferris, Mrs. Ida M., "The Sauks and Foxes in Franklin and Osage Counties, Kansas," Kansas State Historical Society Collections, vol. 11 (1910), p. 366.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "		
NE	° ' "	° ' "		38	57	26
SE	° ' "	° ' "			95	14 22
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2-3

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Richard D. Pankratz, Director, Historic Sites Survey	
ORGANIZATION Kansas State Historical Society	DATE May 6, 1974
STREET AND NUMBER: 120 West Tenth Street	
CITY OR TOWN: Topeka	STATE Kansas 66612
	CODE 20

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☐

Name Nyle H. Miller

Title Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society

Date November 25, 1974

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

38° 57' 26" T. 13 S.

5750' T. 12 S.

6961 IV NE
(LAWRENCE WEST)

2.5 MI. TO U.S. 40
0.5 MI. TO U.S. 59

